A

SERMON

ON

ROMANS viii. 29, 30.

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Printed by G. PARAMORE, *North-Green, Worship-Street;*
And sold by G. WHITFIELD, at the Chapel, City-Road,
and at all the Methodist Preaching-Houses in Town and
Country. 1791.—[Price ONE PENNY.]

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SERMON.

ROMANS viii. 29, 30.

WHOM HE DID FOREKNOW, HE DID PREDESTINATE TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON:——WHOM HE DID PREDESTINATE, THEM HE ALSO CALLED: WHOM HE CALLED, THEM HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; AND WHOM HE JUSTIFIED, THEM HE ALSO GLORIFIED.

1 OUR *beloved brother Paul*, ſays St. *Peter*,* *according to the wiſdom given to him, hath written unto you; as alſo in all his epiſtles, ſpeaking in them of theſe things; in which are ſome things hard to be underſtood; which they that are unlearned and unſtable, wreſt as they do alſo the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction.*

2. It is not improbable, that among thoſe things ſpoken by St. *Paul which are hard to be underſtood*, the apoſtle *Peter* might place what he ſpeaks on this ſubject, in the eighth and ninth chapters of his epiſtle to the *Romans*. And it is certain, not only *the unlearned*, but many of the

* 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

moſt learned men in the world, and not *the unſtable* only, but many who ſeemed to be well eſtabliſhed in the truths of the goſpel, have for ſeveral centuries, *wreſted* theſe paſſages *to their own deſtruction.*

3. *Hard to be underſtood* we may well allow them to be, when we conſider, how men of the ſtrongeſt underſtanding, improved by all the advantages of education, have continually differed in judgment concerning them. And this very conſideration, that there is ſo wide a difference upon the head, between men of the greateſt learning, ſenſe and piety, one might imagine would make all who now ſpeak upon the ſubject, exceedingly wary and ſelf-diffident. But I know not how it is, that juſt the reverſe is obſerved, in every part of the chriſtian world. No writers upon earth appear more poſitive, than thoſe who write on this difficult ſubject. Nay, the ſame men, who writing on any other ſubject, are remarkably modeſt and humble, on this alone lay aſide all ſelf-diffruſt.

"And ſpeak *ex cathedra* infallible."

This is peculiarly obſervable of almoſt all thoſe, who aſſert the abſolute decrees. But ſurely, it is poſſible to avoid this: whatever we propoſe, may be propoſed with modeſty, and with deference to thoſe wiſe and good men, who are of a contrary opinion. And the rather, becauſe ſo much has been ſaid already, on every part of the queſtion, ſo many volumes have been written, that it is ſcarce poſſible to ſay any thing which has not been ſaid before. All I would offer at preſent, not to the lovers of contention, but to men of piety and candor, are a few ſhort hints, which perhaps

perhaps may caſt ſome light, on the text above recited.

4. The more frequently and carefully I have conſidered it, the more I have been inclined to think, that the apoſtle is not here (as many have ſuppoſed) deſcribing a chain of cauſes and effects; (this does not ſeem to have entered into his heart:) but ſimply ſhewing *the method in which God works*; *the order* in which the ſeveral branches of ſalvation, conſtantly follow each other. And this, I apprehend, will be clear to any ſerious and impartial enquirer, ſurveying the work of God either forward or backward: either from the beginning to the end, or from the end to the beginning.

5. And firſt, let us look forward on the whole work of God in the ſalvation of man, conſidering it from the beginning, the firſt point till it terminates in glory. The firſt point is, The foreknowledge of God. God *foreknew* thoſe in every nation, who would believe, from the beginning of the world, to the conſummation of all things. But in order to throw light upon this dark queſtion, it ſhould be well obſerved, that when we ſpeak of God's *foreknowledge*, we do not ſpeak according to the nature of things, but after the manner of men. For if we ſpeak properly, there is no ſuch thing, as either *fore-knowledge* or *after-knowledge* in God. All time, or rather all eternity (for time is only that ſmall fragment of eternity, which is allotted to the children of men) being preſent to him at once, he does not know one thing before another, or one thing after another: but ſees all things in one point of view, from everlaſting to everlaſting. As all time, with every thing that exiſts therein, is preſent with him at once, whatever was, is, or will be to the

end of time. But obſerve. We muſt not think, they *are*, becauſe he *knows* them. No: He knows them, becauſe they are. Juſt as I (if one may be allowed to compare the things of men with the deep things of God) now know, the ſun ſhines. Yet the ſun does not ſhine, becauſe I know it: but I know it, becauſe he ſhines. My knowledge *ſuppoſes* the ſun to ſhine; but does not in any wiſe *cauſe* it. In like manner, God knows, that man ſins; for he knows all things. Yet we do not ſin, becauſe he knows it; but he knows it, becauſe we ſin. And his knowledge *ſuppoſes* our ſin, but does not in any wiſe *cauſe* it. In a word, God looking on all ages from the creation to the conſummation as a moment, and ſeeing at once whatever is in the hearts of all the children of men, knows every one that does or does not believe in every age or nation. Yet what he knows, whether faith or unbelief, is in no wiſe cauſed by his knowledge. Men are as *free* in believing or not believing, as if he did not know it at all.

6. Indeed if a man were not free, he could not be accountable, either for his thoughts, words or actions. If he were not free, he would not be capable, either of reward or puniſhment. He would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad. If he had no more freedom than the ſun, the moon, or the ſtars, he would be no more accountable than them. On ſuppoſition that he had no more freedom than them, the ſtones of the earth would be as capable of reward, and as liable to puniſhment as man: one would be as accountable as the other. Yea, and it would be as abſurd to aſcribe either virtue or vice to him, as to aſcribe it to the ſtock of a tree.

7. But

7. But to proceed. *Whom he did foreknow, them he did predeſtinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son.* This is the ſecond ſtep, (to ſpeak after the manner of men: for in fact, there is nothing *before* or *after* in God.) In other words, God decrees, from everlaſting to everlaſting, that all who believe in the Son of his love, ſhall be conformed to his image, ſhall be ſaved from all inward and outward ſin, into all inward and outward holineſs. Accordingly it is a plain, undeniable fact; all who truly believe in the name of the Son of God, do now *receive the end of their faith, the ſalvation of their ſouls*: and this in virtue of the unchangeable, irreverſible, irreſiſtible decree of God, *He that believeth ſhall be ſaved; he that believeth not ſhall be damned.*

8. *Whom he did predeſtinate, them he alſo called.* This is the third ſtep: (ſtill remembering, that we ſpeak after the manner of men.) To expreſs it a little more largely: According to his firſt decree, that believers ſhall be ſaved, thoſe whom he foreknows as ſuch, he calls both outwardly and inwardly: outwardly by the word of his grace, and inwardly by his ſpirit. This inward application of his word to the heart, leads us to be what ſome term *effectual calling*. And it implies, the calling them children of God, the *accepting them in the Beloved*; the juſtifying them *freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jeſus Chriſt.*

9. *Whom he called, thoſe he juſtified.* This is the fourth ſtep. It is generally allowed, that the word *juſtified* here is taken in a peculiar ſenſe; that it means, he made them juſt or righteous. He executed his decree, *co forming them to the image of his Son*, or (as we uſually ſpeak) *ſanctified them*.

10. It

10. It remains, *whom he juſtified, thoſe he glorified.* This is the laſt ſtep. Having made them *meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light*, he gives them *the kingdom which was prepared for them before the world began.* This is the order wherein, *according to the counſel of his will* [the plan he has laid down from eternity] he ſaves thoſe whom he foreknew, the true believers in every place and generation.

11. The ſame great work of ſalvation by faith, according to the foreknowledge and decree of God, may appear in a ſtill clearer light, if we view it backward, from the end to the beginning. Suppoſe then you ſtood with the *great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and tongue, and kindred, and people*, who *give praiſe unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*: you would not find one among them all, that were entered into glory, who was not a witneſs of that great truth, *Without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*: not one of all that innumerable company, who was not *ſanctified*, before he was *glorified*. By holineſs he was prepared for glory, according to the invariable will of the Lord, that the crown purchaſed by the blood of his Son, ſhould be given to none but thoſe who are renewed by his Spirit. He is become *the author of eternal ſalvation* only *to them that obey him*: that obey him inwardly and outwardly; that are holy in heart, and holy in all manner of converſation.

12. And could you take a view of all thoſe upon earth, who are now *ſanctified*, you would find, not one of theſe had been ſanctified, till after he was *called*. He was firſt called, not only with an outward call, by the word and the meſ-

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ſengers of God, but likewiſe with an inward call, by his Spirit applying his word, enabling him to believe in the only begotten Son of God, and bearing a teſtimony with his ſpirit, that he was a child of God. And it was by this very means they were all ſanctified. It was by a ſenſe of the love of God, ſhed abroad in his heart, that every one of them was enabled to love God. Loving God, he loved his neighbour as himſelf, and had power to walk in all his commandments blameleſs. This is a rule which admits of no exception. God *calls* a ſinner his own, that is, juſtifies him, before he ſanctifies. And by this very thing, the conſciouſneſs of his favour, he works in him that grateful, filial affection, from which ſpring every good temper, and word, and work.

13. And who are they that are thus *called* of God, but thoſe whom he had before *predeſtinated*, or decreed to *conform to the image of his Son?* This decree (ſtill ſpeaking after the manner of men) precedes every man's calling. Every believer was predeſtinated, before he was called. For God calls none, but *according to the counſel of his will*, according to this προθεσις, or plan of acting, which he had laid down before the foundation of the world.

14. Once more. As all that are called were predeſtinated, ſo all whom God has predeſtinated he *foreknew*. He knew, he ſaw them as believers, and as ſuch predeſtinated them to ſalvation, according to his eternal decree, *He that believeth ſhall be ſaved*. Thus we ſee the whole proceſs of the work of God, from the end to the beginning. Who are glorified? None but thoſe who were firſt ſanctified. Who are ſanctified? None but thoſe who were firſt juſtified. Who are juſtified? None

None but thoſe who were firſt predeſtinated. Who are predeſtinated? None but thoſe whom God foreknew as believers. Thus the purpoſe and word of God ſtand unſhaken as the pillars of heaven, *He that believeth ſhall be ſaved: he that believeth not ſhall be damned.* And thus God is clear from the blood of all men; ſince whoever periſhes, periſhes by his own act and deed. *They will not come unto me*, ſays the Saviour of men: and *there is no ſalvation in any other.* They *will not believe*; and there is no other way either to preſent or eternal ſalvation. Therefore their blood is upon their own head: and God is ſtill *juſtified in his ſaying*, That he *willeth all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of his truth.*

15. The ſum of all this is. The Almighty all-wiſe God ſees and knows from everlaſting to everlaſting, all that is, that was, and that is to come, through one eternal now. With him nothing is either paſt or future, but all things, equally preſent. He has therefore, if we ſpeak according to the truth of things, no fore-knowledge, no after-knowledge. This would be ill-conſiſtent with the apoſtle's words, *With him is no variableneſs or ſhadow of turning*: or with the account he gives of himſelf by the prophet, *I the Lord change not.* Yet when he ſpeaks to us, knowing whereof we are made, knowing the ſcantineſs of our underſtanding, he lets himſelf down to our capacity, and ſpeaks of himſelf after the manner of men. Thus in condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, he ſpeaks of his own *purpoſe, counſel, plan, fore knowledge.* Not that God has any need of *counſel*, or *purpoſe*, or *planning* his work before hand. Far be it from us, to impute theſe to the Moſt High; to meaſure him by ourſelves! It is merely in compaſſion to us, that he ſpeaks thus of himſelf, as

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fore-knowing the things in heaven or earth, and as *predeſtinating* or *fore-ordaining* them. But can we poſſibly imagine, that theſe expreſſions are to be taken literally? To one who was ſo groſs in his conceptions, might he not ſay, *Thinkeſt thou I am ſuch a one as thyſelf?* Not ſo *As the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my ways higher than thy ways.* I know, decree, work, in ſuch a manner, as it is not poſſible for thee to conceive. But to give thee ſome faint, glimmering knowledge of my ways, I uſe the language of men, and ſuit myſelf to thy apprehenſions, in this thy infant ſtate of exiſtence.

16. What is it then that we learn from this whole account? It is this and no more. 1. God knows all believers, 2. Wills that they ſhould be ſaved from ſin, 3. To that end juſtifies them, 4. Sanctifies, and 5. Takes them to glory.

O that men would praiſe the Lord for this his goodneſs! And that they would be content with this plain account of it, and not endeavour to wade into thoſe myſteries, which are too deep for men to fathom!

ARMAGH,
June 5, 1773.

F I N I S.